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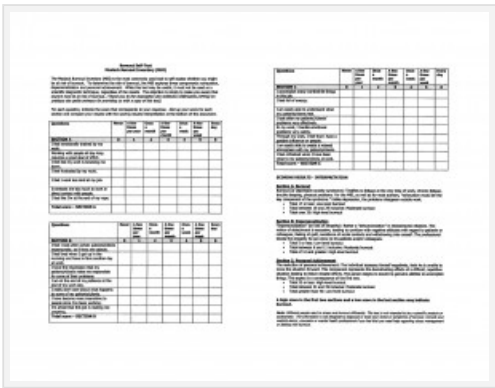
NAVY MEDICINE IN FOCUS

Care for the Caregiver – ‘Caregiver Burnout’

BY VJOHNSON – FEBRUARY 24, 2014

POSTED IN: FEATURES

By Lt. Kay Harris



With the holidays long behind us and as we prepare to move forward in what looks to be a very promising year, now more than ever it is important to be ready for whatever the new year may bring. Many of us are caregivers in some shape, form, or fashion so in an effort to promote the spirit of readiness for our unique population, some tips for preventing caregiver burnout and treating the early symptoms are presented here.

The first and most important thing to do to prevent burnout is to recognize it but its signs and symptoms may not be very obvious to us at first. We are often too preoccupied managing the whirlwind of activities we are presented with in our daily lives to realize when we are having difficulty coping and when do realize it it can be hard to pinpoint the cause to remedy the situation. It is usually best if we notice and address the signs and symptoms of burnout in ourselves before others have the chance to talk with us about the problematic behaviors they may be seeing and a good way to evaluate where we stand in the burnout process is to complete a self administered burnout inventory. One of the best and most widely used scales for measuring experienced burnout in people whose work requires continuous contact with other people is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The MBI assesses burnout on three important dimensions which include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment which also prompts the individuals who use it to the life areas that need the most time and attention.

Once the life areas that are the most deserving of attention have been recognized it is then up to you to find creative ways to address those areas. If you are at a loss for how to do this,



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- September 2014
- August 2014
- July 2014
- June 2014
- May 2014
- April 2014
- March 2014
- February 2014
- January 2014
- December 2013
- November 2013
- October 2013


Categories

- A LOOK BACK
- FEATURES
- I AM NAVY MEDICINE
- NAVY MEDICINE IN FOCUS

reaching out to family, friends, coworkers, and available support services should be your next step. (Be on the look out for the next three Care for the Caregiver articles in the Pacific Frontlines because they will each outline specific information related to these three dimensions including strategies to try and manage them).

Below are some tips that all of us could use in the meantime to prevent burnout and/or treat its early symptoms.

1. **Be aware of the signals your body sends you.** Signs and symptoms of burnout can include headaches, sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, short temper, upset stomach, job dissatisfaction, and low morale.
2. **Be on the lookout for your own dysfunctional burnout coping style and aim to be more flexible in your approach to solving your problems.** All of us have a characterisc way of responding to stress but overuse of some of our perferred methods of coping can do more to increase burnout than prevent it. Notice if you to have thoughts and behaviors associated with:
 - perfectionism (everything must be perfect)
 - selflessness (my own needs aren’t important),
 - passivity (I won’t say or do anything because I don’t want to make waves),
 - avoidance (If I just ignore this, it will go away soon)
 - overcompensation (workaholic)
 - scapegoating (it’s everyone elses fault)
 - the guilt trip (I should be superman or superwoman)
3. **Set realistic goals for yourself.** Take some time to reconsider your work goals and life priorities. Talk with trusted friends, family, and coworkers about how attainable they may be given your current circumstances and make adjustments accordingly.
4. **EXERCISE, EAT RIGHT,** and don’t forget to **TREAT YOURSELF** from time to time.



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